THE MELODY OF GOD'S LOVE

OLIVER HUCKEL

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THE

Melody of God's Love:

A New Piping on the Shepherd's Flute

BEING
A DEVOTIONAL UNFOLDING OF THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM

BY

OLIVER HUCKEL

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DEDICATION.

This little book of devotional studies is dedicated with loving gratitude to that noble company of Christian workers, *The Ladies' Guild of the Associate Reformed Church of Baltimore.* For them it was prepared as a practical unfolding of their chosen psalm and by them it was requested for this wider circulation. The title—"*The Melody of God's Love*" was suggested by their President from a similar title to an older exposition, now long out of print, on The Melody of the 23rd Psalm. And the interpretation owes suggestions here and there to the noble work of Matthew Henry, Pastor C. H. Spurgeon and Rev. F. B. Meyer whose expositions have become classic in religious literature. May God bless this further attempt to reveal the manifold meaning of the wondrous love wherewith He has loved us!

O. H.

Baltimore.

The Melody of God's Love.

FIRST MELODY.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down *in green pastures:* he leadeth me beside the still waters.

SECOND MELODY.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk *through the valley of the shadow* of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

THIRD MELODY.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell *in the house of the Lord forever.*

FOREWORD.

Once in the wars of the Middle Ages, a royal Prince was taken, and immured in a castle stronghold no one knew where. But one who loved him travelled the country over, playing on a shepherd's pipe, beneath every castle's windows, the simple air that they both used to know in their childhood days. And at last at one castle the melody found its response, and a signal was shown, and the Prince was finally rescued.

One who loves you in the love of Christ comes playing again on a shepherd's pipe the simple melody that we used to love in childhood days. Is there a royal spirit captive in the deepest depths of the stronghold of your life? No matter how long the years, how strong the world, how gruesome the sin, there must be a response to the magic air of the melody of God's love. It has oftentimes cheered the captives, soothed the suffering, comforted the dying. It has oftentimes stormed the castle of selfishness, opened the dungeons of sin, and brought forth the royal captive, and made him free again, a royal Prince in the love and power of a royal God.

FIRST MELODY.

In Green Pastures:

A Song of the Sweet and Pleasant Experiences of Life.

We do not know at what time in his life David wrote this psalm. It has all the freshness of the shepherd boy's heart in it, and all the wisdom of the aged king.

This is how we may imagine he wrote it.

It was in his palace in the great banqueting hall. The guests were gone and King David was sitting alone in meditation. He went into a reverie of the past, even into his

boyhood's life. He longed again for the sweet water of Bethlehem's well, and for all the simple pleasures of his shepherd life and the companionship of his sheep that once seemed to him as friends in his love.

And as he meditated on all the course of his life and all God's goodness that had brought him to greatness—God's gentleness that had made him great, — suddenly the thought came and leaped into melody on his lips—The Lord, the Lord is *my* shepherd.

O, those days of green pastures and still waters, with all God's shepherding goodness and love !

But as he thinks further of his life, he remembers that great sin of his life and is sad, but again he remembers God's forgiving goodness

and he sings: He restoreth my soul.

He thinks of the hardships, the right but stern paths travelled in his devious life, but God guided him in all, for His name's sake.

He thinks of the dark places, even the death valley; God was still with him.

And now,—and now as he looks around on his radiant palace walls and banqueting house, he realizes that we are more than under God's care as a flock. God has made us His friends, His own. God's present goodness still amazes him and he sings: Thou preparest a table for me, thou helpest me to triumph over my enemies. Thou art good; my cup runneth over. Surely Thy goodness and mercy have followed me. I will be faithful to Thee forever.

In some such way, it might have been that the divine song bubbled up from the full fountain of David's heart.

And his personal outburst of faith and triumph becomes ours, and becomes attuned to every life. It fits itself into the heart and needs of all humanity and becomes a new confession of faith and hope and love in God.

So we come to listen to this shepherd-music once again. It is a royal shepherd music tuned to the sweetest strains of earth and heaven.

We take up the old sweet familiar words, but we would see them in new lights, hold them in fresh vision, study them with the revealings of deeper love.

Have you ever taken a gem set in

a ring and looked at it in various lights and angles to see its new flashings of beauty and the hidden fountains of its light? This psalm is a priceless gem of purest ray serene.

Have you taken up a lily or a rose, and turned it round and round and lifted it in loving closeness to discover anew its beauty and its fragrance? This psalm is the fairest flower in the garden of the Lord.

Have you ever stood before a noble picture, now on this side, now on that, in morning light and evening, and dwelt upon it till, like a lover, you see new beauty in it unseen to others? This psalm is a picture of the King in His beauty and the land that is afar off.

Have you ever listened to a sweet song or superb symphony till it

became a part of your life, and each time you heard it, it grew more sweet, and melted your heart and lifted your soul as on wings toward heaven? This sweet psalm is a minstrel song from the heart of God. It comes singing itself into the world like a harmony of heaven. It sings new faith and hope and love into the sad heart of the world.

The psalm seems to divide itself into three melodies of two verses each.

The first is the beautiful strain that we may call "In Green Pastures," a song of the sweet and pleasant experiences of life. The second melody is a more heroic strain, "Through the Valley of the Shadow," a song of the hard and deep and sorrowful experiences of life. The third melody is the wondrous tri-

umphant strain, "In the House of the Lord Forever," a song of the exultant and heavenly experiences of life.

And indeed can we not see in these three melodies, the Song of Life? First the life of faith "In Green Pastures;" secondly, the life of hope, even "Through the Valley of the Shadow;" thirdly, the life of love "In the House of the Lord Forever;"—faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love, for God is love.

And the deep melody brings this 23rd psalm, this sweetest song of the Old Testament, into unison with the most heavenly hymns of the New Testament, that matchless thirteenth of first Corinthians, — "And now abideth faith, hope, love; but the greatest of these is love."

So let us listen to the psalm in these three melodies, and listen as King David sings to us the first melody, "In Green Pastures," a song of the sweet and pleasant experiences of life. These are the words:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

He leadeth me beside the still waters.

Once on a time David, I doubt not, played the shepherd's pipe among his flocks under the shade of the trees. It is an ideal instrument for a pastoral life, so handy, so natural, so sweet.

But also, as we know, he played the rustic harp,—the harp often twined with flowers. This was what he used in order to charm away

the madness from King Saul, and this also became the royal harp of his later minstrelsy.

Perhaps as his heart sang this new shepherd song of divine memories, his hand softly caressed the strings of his kingly harp and made an accompaniment low and tender.

Those hands were stilled three centuries ago, the harp has crumbled to dust in the oblivious ages, but how the melody has lingered, the soul of music, in these marvellous words.

Listen! It sings in the soul,—*The Lord is my Shepherd.*

There comes the picture of an Eastern hillside and a shepherd among his sheep; such a picture as we sometimes see among the hills and glades of our Druid Hill. Beautiful picture always, so quiet, tender,

loving. The Eastern shepherd, as many have noticed, comes into loving companionship with his sheep. So long and lone are his vigils with them. He calls them by name. His affection goes out to them. They become his life and care and affection and all his thought. They are in his hands. He would protect them with his life. He thinks and plans for them, leads them, calls them, folds them at evening. They are like a family around him. The ewe lamb feeds at his table. It is an exquisite pastoral picture.

And so also in this intimate and charming way, the Lord is our shepherd.

The Lord has a tender shepherd love. He is wise and strong and careful like a loving shepherd. His

infinitely loving heart outpours its love upon us in daily care and nightly watch. He that keepeth us doth not slumber nor sleep. The Lord it is,—our Father. He who reveals himself to us in the blessed Saviour. He who is realized in us by the blessed Spirit. For our Father, the God of all the world, the Creator of the ends of the earth, He is our Protector, our Guide, our Shepherd.

But the sweet relation is even more personal. Shepherd of all the rolling spheres is he, shepherd of all the multitudes of earth; but best of all, He is my Shepherd, mine own, my very own.

And we are *His* own, His very own. He says to each of us: I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine.

We can each say: He is my Shepherd, caring for and guiding my life.

We can each feel that our Shepherd serves us out of real love to us, as a mother serves the babe that is her own, her heart's love.

We can emphasize this personal relation more and more with increasing pleasure and gladness. It means so much. The child is dead, says the stranger. *My* child is dead, says the weeping mother, with her heart breaking. The Lord is a shepherd, says an onlooker in religious things. The Lord is *my* Shepherd, exclaims with joy the heart that has found him. Jesus is a Saviour, says one who has heard the testimonies. But there is all the difference in the world between that and the personal claim

and joyful assurance, Jesus is *my* Saviour. Let us rejoice constantly in the infinite joy of the personal assurance, the Lord is *my* Shepherd.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, runs the melody. I shall not want.

There is a good promise of God—Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. We may thank God for all spiritual hunger within us, for He has abundant provision to meet it and satisfy it.

I shall not want. It is a blessed assurance of God's bountiful provision. God is abundant and superabundant in all His gifts to the world. He floods the earth with light; He fills the world with beauty; He crowds the universe with life in myriad man-

ifestations. He is prodigal in all His gifts—in the joys of life and the things of the spirit. I shall not want. It is also a blessed assurance of God's perpetual providence. He careth for us. He will see that our lives are not famished for affection, nor our souls starved for lack of spiritual things. More willing is He than any earthly father. Nothing will He withhold. With the best gift of His love, freely will He give us all things.

I shall not want. Many things I may *wish* which I cannot have, because His love sees that they are not best for me. But all that is *needful* will He give.

We worry sometimes over the future, oftener over material things than spiritual. What has the future

for us, will old age bring sickness and poverty, will those we love come at last to destitution? Are the righteous sometimes brought to penury? what can I expect who am full of sins? But let us claim the blessed assurance,—The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. God will take care of me. Let us cast all our cares upon Him, for He careth for us. My shepherd will provide all that is needful for body and for soul.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, singeth nobly the psalmist's song. He maketh me,—as if there were divine compulsions, and there are. Sometimes the Lord maketh us do His will, by the discipline of protracted sickness or enforced idleness or the balking of plans. He maketh for our good. O the blessed tryannies of love!

He maketh me to lie down,–for rest and peace. And we all need these times of quietness before God. The body needs its rest of sleep, the soul needs its quiet of prayer, the whole life needs its day of rest. It was divine wisdom that said, Come ye apart into a desert place and rest awhile.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, to enjoy the sweet and quiet joys and experiences of life, the comfort of home, the rest of the loved one's heart, the quiet hours of reading and music, the fellowship of friends. These are the blessed joys of this earthly life.

He leadeth me beside the still waters,—the melody continues. He leadeth me as a shepherd goeth before his sheep,—He leadeth me into the still

waters of the spiritual joys of life, the things of the divine love that come to us to refresh life and to transfigure it with a tinge and glow of heaven. The flowing river in Ezekiel and the crystal river in Revelation as well as the blessed Master's own words about the water of life, tell us of the still waters, the deep currents of God's own great life, in the midst of humanity. The waters are still with the abounding peace of God; the waters are still with the depths of God's love, those depths that no plummet can ever fathom.

There may be a still further unfolding. For the precious Word of God is like green pastures, full of freshness, beauty, and nourishment, as sweet and fair as at the first. And the Lord's Day is full of quiet and

rest like the still waters of life with the placid hours of worship and soul communion.

But yet further is the unfolding in the light of the gospel revelation, for in a deep and mystic sense the blessed Saviour himself is the green pastures and the still waters for the soul's most intimate communion. He is the bread that cometh down from heaven, the soul's best nutriment; He is the water of life that satisfieth thirst eternal.

For in very truth, the loving Saviour has become fully identified in our thought with every note in the heavenly melody of this psalm. He is not only the green pastures and still waters of the soul's peace and joy, but He is also the abundant satisfaction, the abundant life, so that

we shall not want. And above all, He is the divine and saving shepherd, for so He Himself calls Himself in gracious words, I am the good Shepherd, I know my sheep and am known of mine. My sheep hear my voice and follow Me. The good Shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.

Shall we not say, Dear Lord, Thou art my Shepherd, mine own. Feed me, lead me. I am willing, lead me. Give me thy peace and thy rest, O Lord.

Do we ever wander away from our Shepherd, the loving Saviour. Do we ever lag behind? Do we come always when He calls? Do we love Him as we should?—He gave His life for us. Do we rest in His love and wait patiently for Him?

The thought of resting in God is uppermost in this first melody of the

psalm. It is our privilege and duty. We rest as we take God at His word and trust Him; as we cast all our cares upon Him; as our hearts are purified by his cleansing spirit. We rest in God simply by surrendering our hearts to Him and accepting His will for us. We give ourselves and all we are and have into God's keeping and say, Lord, do with me and for me as Thou knowest best, for Thou lovest best. Then there is peace and rest.

But the thought of the pleasures of such a life of divine trust also comes out in the melody. God wants us not to be distracted by trifles, not to be satisfied with nothings, but to come as He leads into the deepest and richest experiences

of the spiritual life, as the disciple John of old knew. God has for each of us in this life what eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor heart dreamed,—the sweet rest and the refreshing joys of the green pastures and still waters of His own love.

This then is the first melody of the psalm. The life with God here in this world is pleasant. It is shepherded by the eternal love; it is abounding in God's grace; it gives the rest of heart amid the green pastures of earth's divinest joys; it leads us away beside the still waters of eternal depths and infinite peace.

Later we shall see what hardships mean in the music of this psalm, what death means and what is the final note of perpetual triumph. But

here at least in this first melody is life's sweetness, abundance and peace under the tender shepherd love of God.

Can we not take the lesson. We are all under-shepherds, a king and his subjects, a pastor and his people, a mother and her family, a heart and its friends—all under-shepherds. Can we not get this melody of trust and joy singing anew in our souls? It will be a new inspiration in all our work and a new benediction upon our lives.

Let it sing itself in the heart at the break of day like a lark from the meadows. And let it break forth again in the twilight like a nightingale in the evening shadows. And let it chirp cheerily and warble softly

all day long through the toil and troubles of life like a hidden nest of song-birds. Let its liquid melody make all the life joyous with God's overflowing love.

SECOND MELODY.

Through the Valley of the Shadow:

A Song of the Harder and Deeper and More Sorrowful Experiences of Life.

What a multitude of hearts have sung this melody of God's love since the lips of David first whispered the music in loving accents to the world.

Peasant and prince have sung it, children have learned it at their mother's knee, the aged have crooned it as they fell into their last long

sleep. The widow and the orphan have come to it for consolation; the suffering and the sorrowing have found balm in its blessed promises.

For three thousand years it has been upon the lips of mankind, welling up from the heart of mankind as a fountain of praise to the glory of His name. The centuries have been vocal with it as the favorite song of all God's word.

And yet we never tire of it.

It is perennially and perpetually fresh and sweet.

The words of the second melody of the psalm run—

He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will

fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

It is a beautiful melody, but it is a little more sombre in tone than the first. The former sweet song of shepherd love and leadings among green pastures and beside still waters was a tender idyl of pastoral life. Here come some sterner and rather more heroic notes.

The very first words of this melody, "He restoreth," are a revelation of something wrong. It is a phrase with a past. It is an implication of many things that have gone before. It is a retrospective picture in itself.

He restoreth—was it apostacy of soul, was it rebellion of spirit, was it weariness or weakness of life? Something was wrong, something unnatural, something abnormal. Health or

communion was broken, the wish or the will was astray. There is a heart confession in these words.

It may be that the heart has been down in the depths of despair, not lost to God but overwhelmed by trouble until the face of God is almost obscured. And He restoreth unto me the joys of salvation.

It may be that the soul is lost as a wandering sheep, as the one sheep gone astray while the ninety and nine are safe folded in. And God goes seeking with tender compassion and infinite patience, and brings it back again to the fold and restores it to the old love of His great warm heart.

It may be that the life is famishing, starving because it is trying to live in itself and of itself. Perhaps it is

neglecting the means of grace, perhaps living in known sin, perhaps consorting with unwholesome associations, and still thinking to keep in spiritual health and grow in grace. It is impossible. We cannot feed entirely on the world, and still live in God. Our better life will die, we will piteously starve. We need the restoration to His health and love by the tears of penitence, and the breath of prayer and the bread and wine of His love, put to our famished lips.

O, how eager He is to restore us to the joys and health of His love. He woos us in a thousand ways. He tries to persuade us of His tenderness and kindness. And sometimes our hearts are melted by the song of a bird, the gladness of the sunshine, a walk through the woods, the laughter

of a child, the hand-grasp of a friend, to new thoughts of God. God is constantly seeking channels for the inflowing of the streams of His healing and restoring love.

"He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me"—sings the sacred psalm to our hearts.

Two modern hymns have beautifully taken up the melody "He leadeth me, O blessed thought," and "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom, lead thou me on."

He leadeth! It is the Shepherd's part. He leadeth and his flock followeth after him.

Do we remember it? He leadeth! Do we ever try to go faster then He leads. O these self wills and impetuous spirits of ours that are sometimes impatient with God.

He leadeth. If we cannot feel any leadings, let us wait. He will indicate and show either one step at a time or perhaps a great stretch of the way.

Once we were travelling in the mountains in a thunder storm. We had to press on, for there was no shelter. But the way was dark and unknown. Sometimes we had to stop and wait. Then a lightning flash would come and light up a great stretch of the road before us. God sends his lightning flashes of intuition and conviction in all lives.

But not always the lightning flash, sometimes just enough light for a few steps. The miner carries his little lamp in his hat. It goes with him, and lights up a few steps at a time. We carry Christ in our hearts

and the quiet illumination of his example will always light our way for the steps in front of us.

He leadeth. It is an unseen Master. But we can learn to follow His invisible leadings like the birds follow their instincts in migration, like the tides follow the silent behests of the moon, like the curling fire ascends upward toward the higher atmosphere of the sun.

He is an unseen Leader and Guide, but His own blessed example we know. He has blazed a way through the forests of life for us.

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness—in the *right* paths, we may also put it. The right paths may not always be the easy paths. That word righteousness implies a little of sternness and hardness. Here-

tofore it has been green pastures and still waters, but now it may be paths that are stony, steep, thorny, through mountain jungles, deep glens, heavy forests.

They will be right paths, for God wills it. Every day He plans. He is interested in everything that concerns us. All our interests are in God's hand, and God's hand in all the interests of our lives.

We may not understand the ways in which He leads us. It may not seem to us necessary or wise. It may seem hard, severe, cruel, unjust. It may seem dark and mysterious. But we will learn better in the retrospect if we are patient.

"Sometime, when all life's lessons
have been learned,
Then we shall see how all God's
plans were right; . . .
God's plans, like lilies, pure and
white unfold,——
Time will reveal the chalices of gold."

We may not understand all God's leadings of our lives, but it is done, runs the melody, *for His name's sake.* His nature and His name is love. For His love's sake He does it, because He loves you, because He is love, because these His leadings are the honor of love and the wisdom of love. In them all He is true to you and true to Himself. God will not deny His nature and name in His leadings of you.

But even deeper. The hard and stony and thorny paths sometimes lead where the shadows are dark and heavy. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*

It is first of all the deep shadows, the heavy shadows of life, that are meant by the psalmist. But it means

also the last and final valley of the darkest shadow of all.

But primarily the picture is not of death. It is primarily the picture of a dark mountain gorge through which the shepherd leads his sheep. Such a gorge some of us knew in Switzerland, near the Lake of Lucerne at Kussnacht—that dark gorge where legend has it that William Tell shot the tyrant Gessler. It is deep and dark, overhung with frowning banks, rough, thorny vines and thick trees that meet overhead. It is gloomy there even at midday. It is heavy with the shadows at dusk. It is impenetrable blackness at night.

There are many dark valleys in life. The valleys of spiritual depression, of discouragement and despair, of loneliness, of disappointment and

tears of sorrow. These must be passed through oftentimes ere we reach the final valley.

And that valley is darkest of all, loneliest and coldest. The valley of the shadow of death. Death is the monstrous angel whose gloomy wings overshadow it all. It is the valley of pain, of partings, of struggle, of unutterable loneliness.

We must die alone and be judged alone. No one can be vicarious for us in these stern and solemn realities.

But this is only one side of the picture. *Even though I come down to this dark valley*, we may sing with the psalmst, *I will fear no evil for Thou art with me!*

We do not die alone, after all, for we can look up and say to our loving Father, Thou art with me.

He is with us and the angels of his presence are with us to carry us to the paradise of His love.

He is with us and this gives the death-valley an entirely new aspect and significance.

It is said that in Damascus there has been for centuries, a long, dark secret passage that goes from the common street, and one who enters there passes through dampness and darkness, but suddenly he issues forth into the sunlight in the beauty and the glory of the inner court of an Oriental palace. This is the meaning of death. A dark passage that leads to great light and beauty in the palace of the King.

Some of us know such a similar tunnel near the Lakes of Killarney, in Ireland. It is hard travelling in

a desolate country for many miles to the Magillicuddy Reeks. Then the coach enters a long mountain tunnel and as it comes out, it is a revelation of beauty. A magnificent prospect flashes before the eye,—lakes and islands and forests that seem like a paradise of God.

Death is only a shadow on life. It is not an end, but an incident. The death valley only leads to the portals of a larger and more glorious life.

We remember as we think of the valley of the shadow, all those whom we have loved long since and lost awhile. We thank God for the benediction that their sweet memory is upon our lives, as fragrance in the heart, as refreshing water to the soul, as heavenly hands laid in blessing upon our brows.

God was with them in the valley of the shadow and the silence. Their heads were pillowed upon His love. They trusted Him and were not afraid.

And they have taught us how to behave and be trustful. Even the valley of the shadow has the glimmering of light in it, for their memory illumines it and makes it not altogether a lonely or an unknown place.

And they have led us on past the shadows to the heaven-side. The great beyond is no longer vague and void to us. It is warm and bright and joyous to us in anticipation, for they are there. We bless God that the valley of the shadow leads to glory, to all the wonderful visions of the Delectable Mountains, and beyond that to our Father's Home, *our* Home, for

some of our loved ones are already there.

There is something very significant here. Have you noticed it? The psalmist all along has been speaking of God. *He* is my shepherd; *He* leadeth me. But when he comes to the thought of the death-valley, his feelings become more personal and he says *Thou*. Not, For He is with me, but, For *Thou* art with me. There is a secret here. God does become nearer to us, God becomes more and more personal to us through trouble and sorrow. When all is prosperous, we talk *about* God; when death draws nigh, we talk *to* Him.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *I will fear no evil.*

What a relief it is to get rid of fear. Some live with the sword of Damocles constantly hanging over their heads. They fear this and they fear that. Fear is constantly fretting their lives. It is learning the most splendid philosophy of life when we learn to take God at His word, trust Him and banish fear. Perfect love casteth out fear. Fear hath torment. But God can rid us of it in all the petty trials of life and even in the last great trial, so that we can face even death without fear or foreboding. There is the promise, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

For Thou art with me—that is the end of fear. If God is with us,

nothing can harm us in life or death. For He is Lord of both.

Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. It is the shepherd's care and love again. For the rod was to protect the sheep from wolves and robbers, and the staff, the shepherd's crook, to guide the flock. It is God's protection and guidance that is portrayed. God is with me to the last,—His guarding and His guiding love follow me to the very end.

Would that God might give us to sing this melody continually — "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

We need this note in our hearts in all the daily work of life and in all the hard places of life—"I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

We need the conquest of fear, we

need the consciousness of the presence of God.

We whistle as we pass through a dark woods. Let us sing this song of cheer and confidence as we pass through the gloomy places of life.

For Thou art with me, For Thou art with me. This is the blessed keynote of this second melody and of the whole psalm.

And we can say—"I would rather walk in the dark with God than walk alone in the light."

This very day as I was meditating on this melody of the Valley of the Shadow there came to me as a legacy from Philadelphia, from a dear friend just recently in Heaven, a large picture handsomely framed called "The Deathbed of John Wesley." It is a sad picture and yet a most beautiful

one. The aged saint seems haloed with a circle of light, a heavenly smile is upon his face and the group of ministers and friends around him look at him lovingly and listen for his last words as he walks through the valley of the shadow and nears the end. It is an intensely interesting picture to me. It is the transfiguration of death by the shining of a heavenly glory. And I can almost hear him say as I look at the picture those last words of his,—"The best of all is—God is with us." He had caught the music of David's psalm. Thou art with me. I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.

The Alpine shepherds have a beautiful custom of ending the day by singing a refrain to each other. The air is so crystalline clear that the song

will carry long distances. As dusk begins to fall, they gather their flocks and begin to lead them down the mountain paths singing: "Hitherto hath the Lord led us. Let us praise His name." And at last with a sweet courtesy, they sing to each other the words, Gute Nacht, Good Night, Good Night! And the words are taken up by the echoes and from side to side the song goes reverberating sweetly and softly until the sounds die away in the distance.

When the shadows fall about us at last and the night comes creeping in the valley, may this blessed melody of God's love still sing in our hearts,—"I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me," and God will answer, Lo, I *am* with you alway, even unto the end.

THIRD MELODY.

In the House of the Lord Forever:

A Song of the Exultant and Triumphant and Heavenly Experiences of Life Here and Hereafter.

It will be suggestive to us to recall the way in which we were supposing that this sweet psalm may have been written. We thought that King David may have been sitting in his banqueting hall, in his palace, in the evening. The guests were gone. The lamps dimly burning. And

he was in reminiscent mood. He thrummed on his harp, which he always had near him and he sang the snatches of melody that came to his heart. He remembered his boyhood days around the well of Bethlehem and on the hillsides with the sheep. He remembered his varied life, and how God had cared for him and he sang, as he remembered his own shepherd love and care, and as the thanksgiving brimmed from his heart, The Lord is *my* Shepherd. He has cared for me as I cared for my sheep. He has been with me in green pastures and even in the valley of the shadow.

But in his thought the folding of the sheep is done, evening has come, and now the shepherd king strikes a new note, perhaps suggested by his own banqueting-hall where he is sit-

ting. It is a note, a vision of higher communion:

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

There is a sweetness, a surety, an exultant confidence in this final melody that is contagious with all gladness and thanksgiving.

Thou preparest a table before me. We are more than the sheep of the Good Shepherd; we are friends of God. The Lord is our host, we are His guests; and all life is the banqueting table of the Lord.

It is a table of bounties. There is

refreshment for the eyes in all the beauty of Nature and life; there is refreshment for the ear in the sweet sounds of Nature, the voices of friends, and in the symphonies that man creates in noble harmonies; there is refreshment for the mouth in the luscious fruits; there is refreshment for the brain in noble thoughts and high converse; there is refreshment for the body in "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep"; there is refreshment for the heart in the loves of kindred and friends; there is refreshment for the soul in the visions of truth and the gracious opportunities of beautiful service for God.

It is a table of bounties, of food convenient for the whole life; a banquet spread by the love of the Father; angel's food, new every morning, fresh every evening.

The sacrament of the Lord's Table

is symbolical of the everlasting banquet of God's love, the bread of goodness, the wine of love forever. The sacrament of Nature is perpetually the Lord's Table to eyes that have vision, where love in continual sacrifice is day by day redeeming all things to the heavenly life.

Thou preparest — God beautifully anticipates our needs. Before we speak, He answers. As Hager and Ishmael faint in the desert, His anticipatory love bubbles forth in a refreshing spring of water from the sands.

Thou preparest a table before me *in the presence of mine enemies.* Every life is beleagured with enemies, foes within and foes without. Sloth, doubt, selfishness attempt

to waste the life, but God reveals His goodness and inspires us. Poverty and disease and bereavement seem as enemies to starve the life, but God spreads the banquet of His love in their very presence, and we learn "to suffer and grow strong." His gentleness hath made us great. He has brought us into His banqueting house, and His banner over us is love.

Thou anointest my head with oil. It is God's royal welcome to us; it is the glad salutation that goes with the word of greeting and the kiss of peace. It is an Oriental token of love. The blessed Master knew it and loved it in His day. It is the fragrance of friendship.

The Lord rejoices to have us as His guests at the banqueting table of

life. He takes pleasure in us. He welcomes us into life. The mother's kiss at birth and God's kiss at death,—they are welcomes into life and life eternal.

My cup runneth over.—The cup is the brimming chalice of the varied experiences of life. Hold up your cup and look at it! What are the experiences? What does your life, "heaven's consummate cup," hold as its most precious distillation? Joys are sparkling there, happiness bubbling, but tears also and the dregs of sorrow.

Once I drank a brimming goblet of the wine of tears, and in the last and bitter dregs, I found a pearl. There are blessings in sorrows.

The Master found His cup full of anguish unutterable. The agony of

the Garden was confessed in those whispered words—"Father, let this cup pass. Nevertheless, ... Not as I will, but Thy will be done."

It was a cup of mingled drink. His cup was running over, but running over with shame, bitterness, torture; dashed with ingratitude and scorn; stained with blood; darkened with death.

This was the cup of the eternal Oblation offered once for all.

But our cups, — the bitterest is sweet in comparison. He drank the bitterness for us. And now our cups are largely cups of happiness,—the myriad joys that God has given us,—the sweetness of life, the beauty of Nature, the comradeship of friends, the love of kindred and children, the joyousness of thought and worship.

Oftentimes on a radiant morning when all things seem worth while and life worth living, does not your cup of happiness, even yours, seem sweet and full, overflowing with God's goodness?

My cup *runneth over*, — that is God's way.

He gives us more than we deserve, more than we can hold. As children make holes in the sand, and wait to see the incoming tide fill them, and it does, filling them full, full to overflowing, with a royal and limitless abundance, so God's love fills the cup of our lives. The sparkling wine of life is the vintage of God's love.

We have abundance enough to overflow and bless others. Our hearts need never be arid; our faith merely watering our own garden. God

gives us an abundant life. And the more we pour on the hearts of others, the more will our own lives feel His inexhaustible goodness.

But now we come to another word: *Surely*—sings the sweet singer with exultation,—and we may expect a burst of rapturous faith. Surely—for God's promises cannot fail.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me. Here is the courageous and confident confession. He cries: I follow the Lord, and as I follow, I am followed, for goodness and mercy, God's twin angels, follow me as a heavenly escort and retinue; "goodness to supply every want, mercy to forgive every sin." Goodness and mercy—daughters of God with His own features in their sweet mystic

faces, and His own dear love looking out of their tender eyes.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me *all the days of my life*—Who knows what the days shall be, for none can lift the veil of the future? Some will be bright with a great joy, some troubled and weary with disappointments and suffering, some dark with death. But in them all—in summer's thirst, and winter's cold, and springtime restlessness, and autumn dreariness—in all the days of my life God and His angels shall beset me behind and before to put new blessing upon my life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever,—runs the royal melody.

I will dwell—where we dwell is home. What a sweet word is

"home," the dwelling place of love. The old homestead has its peculiar and tender associations in our hearts, but it is not home if all the loved ones are gone. Home is where our loved ones are. Home here is promise of heaven there.

This life is often likened to an inn in which we lodge for a day and a night on the road to eternity, and so it is. Our dwelling place is not here. The true dwelling place, the true home of the soul, is told in the secret of the psalmist, O Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

> God is the home
> To which we come
> When death has passed
> To life at last.

I will dwell *in the house of the Lord*—it is Heaven, yes, but it is

more than Heaven. It is all life and all the universe where God is. God is Heaven.

Your own house and home may be a house of the Lord. Your business house is to be not merely a house of merchandise but a house of the Lord. Your church is a house of the Lord. The whole earth with its templed woods and bending heavens is a house of the Lord. If God be with us, we never go out from the house of the Lord.

Said the Master—In my Father's House are many mansions. Yes, but they are all mansions of His love. Life is full of mansions of imagination; death is full of mansions of reality. Should every star in God's heaven be a mansion, all are mansions of His eternal love. For

they are in our Father's House—our Father's It is a family gathered there,—the whole family in heaven and on earth,—all joy and gladness, no pain or parting, the cup filled to overflowing with love in the Paradise of God.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord *forever.* Forever and surely,—these are the two great bell-like notes of this melody,—*surely and forever.*

Certainty and permanence,—surely and forever! *Forever*—it is the music of eternity, but it has its refrain in the time of this world. It can begin now. A foretaste of Heaven is possible in this world to those who follow the Gleam. They that dwell in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the glorious shadow

of the Almighty. Heaven is dwelling in God's love now and forever.

It is a life of conquest and triumphant joy when we enter into the peace and strength of the practice of the presence of God. It is triumph over the pettiness and vanities of life, for it is entering into larger and nobler things. It is conquest over sin for the higher life seems so much easier and more worthy. It is victory over death, for we come into the perpetual realization that life and death are both alike to God, His servants for bringing us into newness of love.

The joys of the spiritual life in this world are the finest and most exultant experiences. The sweet communion with the divine, the thrill of the spirit, the ecstasy of deep devotion.

But the surprises of eternity will be the new capacities and the new revelations. We shall learn what fulness of joy means, and the infinite pleasures which are at His right hand forevermore.

What a note concerning immortal permanence is struck in this supreme outburst of the minstrel heart of David. Life is so fickle, transitory, shifting. We want a stay for the soul. We want foundations that will not shift with the sands. Here it is. We can dwell in the house of the Lord, in God's very presence, now, daily and hourly, forever.

> "I know not where His islands lift
> Their fronded palms in air,
> I only know I cannot drift
> Beyond His love and care."

We have sung again in this devotional way the melody of God's love.

It is a song of life,—a song of faith, walking with the Shepherd ; a song of hope even in the shadows of death ; a song of love in the perpetual banquet-house of God forever.

It sings a triple melody,—In Green Pastures, a song of the sweet and pleasant experiences of life ; Through the Valley of the Shadow, a song of the hard and dark and sorrowful experiences of life ; and In the House of the Lord Forever, a song of the exultant and triumphant and heavenly experiences of life in this world and the world to come.

L. of C.

It brings to us more and more sweetly the music of the Gospel for the heart, and the loving voice of our own Good Shepherd.

We thank God for this psalm—sweetest in sentiment, most melodi-

ous in music, most uplifting in its pure and exultant faith among all the psalms.

"The Twenty-third Psalm," as one has nobly said, "is the nightingale among the psalms. It is small and of homely feather, singing shyly out of obscurity; but oh! it has filled the air of the whole world with melodious joy greater than the heart can conceive. Blessed be the day on which that psalm was born."

We have sung again with David the melody of God's love. It has brought back to us, perchance, some of the forgotten music and memories of our own lives. The story is told of Ole Bull that once in New York City he sought out his fellow-countryman the inventor Ericsson to mend a certain part of his violin for him. Ericsson

was glad to do the mending, but told him frankly that he had not been to any of his concerts, that he did not enjoy music, and the violin least of all, and never would. A few days later Ole Bull called for his intrument and before he took it away played a few bars to see that all was right. It was only a simple melody,—a Norwegian folk song,—but Ole Bull saw that Ericsson was interested and listening. And he played on. He played a shepherd's song and Ericsson said, "Why, that's our hillside among the sheep." And he played the purling music of the rills and Ericsson felt it, and the tears came to his eyes, as he said, "I can hear the brooks in the forest in the springtime." And Ole Bull played on,—the vintage festival songs, and the marriage hymns, and the funeral dirges, and

the majestic chorales of the church worship. And as Ole Bull played on in his wonderful way, for he was a master of music, Ericsson sat there and cried like a child, for it brought back to him all his boyhood days and his dear old home and his mother and friends. He forgot it was music; it seemed a revelation.

This ancient psalm of God's love has a divine genius in it. It sings deeply to our own hearts. It tells us of our own forgotten lives. It stirs the depths of our noblest devotion. It lifts us to new heights of exultant faith. May it sing in our hearts forever; may it bring us perpetually into tune with the infinite; may it raise our hearts constantly above the troubles and discords of life, and may it fill all our thoughts and words and deeds day by day with the very melody of God's eternal love.

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